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Gray, J. C.

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HOW TO START Co-operative Stores.

A Paper prepared with a View to Facilitate
the Formation of Co-operative Societies
and issued as a Tract by order of the
Office Committee.

BY J. C. GRAY.

GENERAL SECRETARY TO THE CO-OPERATIVE UNION.

ISSUED BY THE
CO-OPERATIVE UNION LIMITED, LONG MILLGATE, MANCHESTER.

How to Start Co-operative Stores.

The desire to form Co-operative Stores in towns or villages where, as yet, there are none, generally arises in the minds of some who have seen or heard of the doings of Co-operation in places where it has already gained a firm footing. Having seen the good which the movement has been capable of accomplishing in other towns and villages, they become anxious to obtain its advantages and benefits for their own neighbourhood, and set about thinking how this end can be accomplished. We may suppose that their first impulse will be to talk the matter over with a few friends or fellow-working men, and see how far they are willing to aid in the formation of a society. This, at least, is what they should do. Having obtained the support of a few earnest men who are anxious to give the thing a fair trial, the next question naturally is:—How are we to proceed to form a society, and what steps are necessary to adopt to be put on a proper and legal footing? The object of this tract, then, is to make known to those who are desirous of establishing Co-operative Stores the best method of attaining their object.

The first step is to appoint a

Provisional Committee,

who shall put themselves in communication with the Co-operative Union, whose duty and pleasure it is to freely give all possible help in the promotion of new societies.*

The provisional committee shall also communicate with the centres of the various bodies of working men in

* The Executive of the Co-operative Union is the Central Board, which is divided into seven sections, six for England and Wales, viz., the Midland, Northern, North-Western, Southern, South-Western, and Western counties respectively, and one for Scotland. If those who desire to form a new society do not know which section to apply to, they may always write to the General Secretary, Central Offices, Long Millgate, Manchester, who will place them in communication with the proper section.

the neighbourhood, inviting their co-operation in the work, with a view to ascertain how far their assistance may be relied on in the event of a society being established.

The Co-operative Union will, on application, send a free supply of tracts for general distribution. These should be well distributed throughout the place, and will help to arouse a public interest in the matter. When sufficient interest has been aroused, the provisional committee should arrange for

A Public Meeting

to be held, making it as widely known as possible. The Union, or the section in which the intended society is situate, will, if asked, send speakers (free of charge), who will explain to the meeting all about the principles and practices of the movement. After these matters have been explained, and resolutions in support of the object of the meeting have been adopted, an announcement should be made that the secretary of the provisional committee will receive the names of those persons willing to join; also, if any of the audience are anxious for a still further explanation regarding the advantages of co-operation, the provisional committee will be most happy to afford them personal interviews after the meeting.

After the public meeting, it may be found that the committee have received a sufficient number of names to warrant them in starting a society with a fair hope of success.

Rules.

The Co-operative Union have prepared a set of general rules for the use of co-operative societies. These rules meet all the requirements of the Industrial and Provident Societies Act, and have been approved by the Chief Registrar of Friendly Societies. Any society wishing to adopt these rules can do so by means of a few special rules prefixed, in which any alterations of the general rules desired by the society may be embodied, and which the General Secretary of the Union would be happy to prepare on being informed of the wishes of such society.

The cost of the general rules is 1½d. per copy; there would also be an additional cost for printing and making up the special rules, but the amount of this item would vary in proportion to the quantity of rules ordered. Specimen copies of the general rules, with model special rules prefixed, will be supplied on application to the Co-operative Union. When the committee have finally decided on the special rules to be adopted, they should forward them to the Co-operative Union to be printed and put in proper form for registration. When the general rules are adopted, the printing will be confined to the special rules, the general rules being kept in stock to be made up with the special rules. The addresses of the Registrars' offices are - for England and Wales, 28, Abington Street, Westminster, S.W.; for Scotland, 3A, Howe Street, Edinburgh; and for Ireland, 16, Dame Street, Dublin. The rules, when printed, must be signed by seven members and the secretary, and accompanied by a form of application, properly filled up as required by the Treasury Regulations. In the case of societies adopting the general rules of the Co-operative Union, the Union will undertake the printing of the special rules and the filling up of the application form, and thus save the secretaries of new societies a task which, to some, appears to be difficult. When the Registrar has passed the rules, he will keep one copy and return the other, with his certificate of registration, to the society. There is no charge for registering a new society.

As soon as the rules are duly registered, the provisional committee must call a general meeting of the members for the

Election of Officers

under the rules. The elected committee will then proceed to take steps towards commencing business—on all important matters consulting the members before final settlement.

The Shop

is a very important consideration, both in regard to the means of the society, the convenience of its members, and its adaptability for the business. All these things,

especially the first, must be very carefully considered. As regards fittings, it would be wise in most cases to consult the Wholesale Societies in England and Scotland,* according to the locality, before finally deciding, as the articles required, such as counters, scales, canisters, &c., &c., can be supplied by them at a much cheaper rate than the society would get them for elsewhere.

The Storekeeper or Manager

should be carefully selected—very much of the future success of a society depends upon the kind of store-keeper engaged at the commencement. He should be a man of co-operative sympathies, and, if possible, trained in some co-operative store. He will then be able to bring his previously acquired knowledge to the aid of the new society. A thoroughly capable, courteous, honest man of this description is invaluable at the commencement of a new store, and should be treated accordingly. Advice in the selection of a competent man will be willingly given by the Co-operative Union.

The Purchase of Goods, and Amount and Kind of Stock to Keep.

On this matter by far the wisest plan is to consult the Wholesale Society for the district where the society is placed. A copy of the registered rules should be forwarded to them showing that a society has been properly established. They will then be glad to do all in their power to put any new society on the right track. They will advise as to the kind of stock to be kept, and the quantity of each article that may be reasonably expected to be sold with a given number of members. They will, if requested, forward to the society a list of the articles and quantities which they recommend for a first purchase. The society could then vary this list according to

* The Head Offices of these societies are—for England : The Co-operative Wholesale Society, 1, Balloon Street, Manchester. Scotland : The Scottish Co-operative Wholesale Society, Paisley Road, Glasgow. There are large branches, depôts, and salerooms in different parts of the kingdom.

any local necessities. It is to the interest of the Wholesale Societies to guide societies aright, therefore they may be safely entrusted not to thrust upon a new society more goods than is wise for them to purchase.

Checks upon Purchase.

Having decided upon the goods to be purchased, the committee then have to determine in what manner they will ascertain the trade done by the members. This may be done in various ways, which are fully explained in the "Manual of Check Systems," price 4d., published by the Co-operative Union. Probably the best system for a young society is to provide each member with a book in which all his purchases are entered as they are made, the total at the close of the quarter showing the amount on which he is entitled to dividend. Every co-operative society is obliged to have a seal, which can be obtained from the Wholesale Societies or Co-operative Printing Societies at as reasonable a charge as the same can be obtained for elsewhere. They will also supply the other requisites of the systems of checks mentioned in the check manual, if the society desire to adopt any other than the member's book.

Method of Bookkeeping.

The next step, and one of the greatest importance, is the consideration of the method of bookkeeping. The necessity for great care in this department cannot be too strongly impressed upon any society just commencing business. More societies have been wrecked through a bad system of bookkeeping than from any other cause. The Co-operative Union have endeavoured to meet this difficulty by publishing two works on the subject:—(1) "Easy Bookkeeping for Small Co-operative Societies," price 6d.; (2) "A System of Bookkeeping for Co-operative Societies," price 2s. 6d., or 3s. post free. Either one or both of these works should be got by the secretary of the society, and carefully read over before a start is made. The Co-operative Wholesale Societies and the Co-operative Printing Societies will furnish estimates of the cost

of the books required, according to the system which the society decides to adopt. They can make them up in different qualities to suit the means of any society. If there is anything in the system of bookkeeping which the secretary cannot at first understand, he should apply to the Co-operative Union for advice, so that he may start right, as it is much easier to alter at the beginning than after the books have been kept wrong for some time.

Having now obtained all the requisites for a commencement—a shop and fittings, a competent manager, a good and suitable stock of goods, check system, and a thoroughly earnest secretary, with a good system of books—the society can now fairly launch into business, and its future success depends largely on the loyalty of its members. Every member of a society should make it a point of honour to buy, at his own store, all of his daily requirements that are there kept in stock. With loyalty and good management, success is sure.

We will conclude this sketch by a few words of general advice. One point of great importance for new societies is, they should become connected with all the various co-operative organisations, which, at present, are—the Co-operative Union, the Co-operative Wholesale Society, the Co-operative Newspaper Society, and the Co-operative Insurance Society. The society should also encourage its members in all possible ways to take the *Co-operative News* regularly, so that they may be kept well informed of the co-operative doings in other places. Societies which keep themselves isolated from their fellow-societies never succeed as well, in a co-operative sense, and not often in a purely commercial sense, as those which come in connection with other societies in conferences and other meetings, and so keep thoroughly abreast of the times. Unity should be the motto of all societies. Unity amongst their own members, each striving for the common good. Unity with kindred associations, so as to confer and receive mutual help. Thus will the co-operative cause be helped onward; all working together and tending towards the same goal.

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